

The Centre of Memories: work in progress. Case of the Michel Giacometti Labour Museum, Setúbal, Portugal¹

Isabel Victor

The **Centre of Memories**, formally presented in the early 2009, at the time of the exhibition "**13 fotos, 13 histórias, 13 filmes**", is today a *key area* of the Michel Giacometti Labour Museum. Its projects, strongly anchored in fieldwork, are the basis of this Centre of Memories and the partnerships which emerge from it, the network that supports it. In this paper we present projects begun four years ago, as is the case of "**Varinos, nós?**", an uneasy reflection on the construction of identity categories, resorting to kinship and family genealogies. Another project entitled "**Cartografias da memória**" refers to places and images which are like anchors of resistance memories. The "**Festa de Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Tróia**", the sea procession, which the museum has been following for five years in its multiple changes and adaptations, is another area of study and observation, fully recorded in the "**Caderno de campo virtual**" which we have been creating and sharing through the platform "Memória Média", in cooperation with IELT, Institute for Traditional Languages and Literatures of the New University of Lisbon. Finally, reference is made to the project "**100 anos, 100 fotografias**", a revisitation of the 100 years of Setúbal's highly emblematic club: **Vitória Futebol Clube**.

The work on Social Memory, focused on the biographic method and the paths of immaterial Heritage, are the fabric that we have chosen to substantiate the idea of museum. The

¹ A reduced version of this paper will be published in the forthcoming issue of the journal *Museologia.pt*, IMC, Lisbon, November 2010

social dimensions of memory, its construction and representation, are the thickness of the exhibition fabric. The specificity of museological work in contemporary times resembles a fine lace, a meticulous weaving of threads that flow from time, admirable lace, painstaking and complex, created with many needles, made up of hollow spots and stitches (of memories and things forgotten). Repetitions and symmetries are the pace that perpetuates it, the rhythmic grammar that gives it body. A fluid body, a single piece, circumstantial. It is always possible to create new patterns, new compositions, with the same threads. Accurately made, properly made, this lace of memories and things forgotten is always an extraordinary creation, a web of wonder that expands fantasy, generates value and feeds the endless reserve of the community's knowledge, values and beliefs.

We leave here the metaphor in which we became intertwined so as to, in a pragmatic manner, speak of practical examples. The **Centro de Memórias do Museu do Trabalho Michel Giacometti** [Centre of Memories of the Michel Giacometti Labour Museum], imbued of the strong conviction that everything stems from *field-work*, has developed for over two decades ways of registering and transmitting memories, especially memories related to labour and assembly lines in industrial and craft production contexts. However, this project only started "coming to life" about four years ago, when we were first equipped with the practical and theoretical tools to implement it, when we were able to organize concepts, name the various stages, identify processes and gather the necessary means to put into action and articulate *anchor projects* which came to emerge from the dynamics created between the museum, the local communities, universities, Institutes and Study Centres.

Let us then start describing some of these *anchor projects* and the methodologies we tried out:

"**Varinos, nós ?**" [*Varinos, us?*] was the first of these attempts, carried out jointly with the Anthropology Department of the New University of Lisbon. In this case, a classic anthropological tool was reinvented, kinship, as nuclear net in

the transmission of memories within five families of Murtoseira origin, who added to Setubal's migratory ballast in the early days of the fish preserves industry. This thorough fieldwork resulted in an exhibition of the same name and in the production of visual documents which supported it. This proved to be a crucial means to engage in dialogue with the different publics and family members who integrated the network of informants. The carefully chosen objects displayed were the result of negotiation, and represent what in each family represents the Murtoseiro legacy of the *varinos*, who came to Setubal looking for work at the end of the 19th century.



Work session with **volunteers** at the Centre of Memories, on a Tuesday, with Edite Barreira, a sociologist who collaborated in the initial stage of the project, Viewing photographs of the **Américo Ribeiro Photo Archive**



Rosa Almeida, elderly woman belonging to one of the families of "**varinos**", visiting the exhibition where she herself shows us the photo of her mother, held ceremoniously between her fingertips

They are icons of a culture, "talking" objects which become heritage by the action of the people in the community and the museological and/or exhibition processes which endow them with a discourse, a relational dynamics involving a rediscovery of the senses. This work proved crucial to understand the

museum's mission and the tools it operates with. The people in the community are involved in the processes leading to the identification and heritage-making of the material and immaterial goods which make up the cultural broth. Rather than being a "resource", they become "agents" of museological action.

The museum acquires new communication/action dimensions, it expands. Thus the collector is collective and the decision to turn objects into heritage is shared, discussed from the start. When they return to people's homes, to the families, the objects are no longer the same. They return because the museum's goal is not to hoard "voiceless" objects in reserve, but rather to give them new life, new cultural uses within the very community, creating networks and complicities around the idea of heritage and the structuring value of memory.

[Varinos, us? How to turn a feeling into a museum...]

"The object only has existence in the gesture that renders it technically effective"(A . Leroi – Gourhan)

What, then, were these objects "offered" in exhibition? What gestures, or to be more exact what gestualities render them significant? What narratives do they refer us to? What subtleties give them emotion? How does one turn feeling into a museum... that is the question.

The challenge was to generate knowledge and raise disquiet regarding an identity category – "**varinos**", indelible mark in the humanscape of Setubal, apparently crystallized in a historic alley. Now, taking as ballast the meticulous fieldwork carried out by Marta Ferreira and Ricardo Lousa, senior undergraduates in Anthropology of the New University of Lisbon, doing an academic internship at the Michel Giacometti Labour Museum, we sought to transport to museographic language one of the more interesting aspects of this study: "a *varino* feeling", somewhat diffuse, hard to define, worn out by time, which some people from different generations tell us about, people related to families of *murtoseira* origin who

migrated to Setúbal in the mid 19th century, looking for work in fishing and in fish preserves.

This identity category, so often patented in a quaint “postcard” requires definition. It requires questions for which we seldom find answers in the words spoken. Today, when we ask our informants what is and how we can distinguish a *varino*, they refer to space/time coordinates – someone who lives somewhere between Fontainhas and Bairro Santos, who has ancestors in Murtosa, who lived in a certain way, according to certain principles... which today are very difficult to identify, almost impossible to materialize expographically.

The problem is that times have changed, and the idealized notion of the “postcard” fisherman, on a chequered shirt and cap, has also changed. Without these external signs, it is crucial to ask what self-representation do the younger representatives of this so-called “*varino*” identity have, what image do people from Setúbal, in general, have of the acclaimed Setubal fisherman of Murtosa origin. One even asked, by way of provocation – would it be a motive of ethnographic interest, photographic pretext, tourist banner or heritage topic, to have a fisherman who sails the river by morning and surfs the internet in the evening? Does someone apparently indistinct, who wears Lois jeans, a Lacoste polo shirt and Ray Ban sunglasses fit our imaginary picture of the fisherman? Which cartography of the mind does this man fit? In which human landscape do we imagine him? What future do we predict for him? And what about him, how does he feel in these ambiguous times?

This character, paradigm of many others, is not fiction, he has a real existence in the local sea community, summarized in the life story of the youngest link in one of the five “*varino*” families we studied.

By imposition of the times, by social mimesis, in response to new needs and functionalities of modern life, this fisherman of a new kind has cast off stereotypes, definitely lost his outside signs of exoticism, dictated by clothes, speech and way of being. He inhabits another space in the city and in the imaginary world; therefore it is within himself that we must go

to discover that “*varino* feeling” which surfaces when he talks to us about his childhood in the neighbourhood, about the bands of boys who roamed the city on foot, about the time spent fishing with his father, about the ritualization of customs, about playing cards in bars. This is someone who feels he is an offspring of the contemporary world, member of the global community, but aware and certain of a particular origin which exalts him and anchors him to a striking past. He spoke to us from the standpoint of his thirty five years of age, of the tremendous will to leave everything behind (at present he is towboat captain) and follow in his father’s footsteps, invest in the old family boat, a vessel called “Alice dos Santos”, the name of his grandmother, and sail away, across the sea, catching octopus, squid, sole, etc., following in the family’s tradition, without giving up the company of the modern laptop which throws him into the fast waves of the world when the river waters are more stagnant and the fish insist on hiding. So, let us come back to the disquiet: *how to turn a feeling into a museum...*, in this case “a *varino* feeling”. We decided to ask each family to choose an object which was meaningful to the *varino* inheritance, with a view to presenting five objects with “story”. A problem arose – men and women do not converge in this choice. Therefore, we changed the rules and agreed to display two objects per family, one chosen by the men and the other chosen by the women. Also, each family took from the album the more significant photographs for us to exhibit in the museum. All the labels/captions were made with the participation of our interlocutors and in their way of telling. But some, especially older people, could not read... so, to allow visual access, we filmed what they told us about their respective objects, the associated meanings and gestualities. It was then very interesting to find what words do not always explain. Exemplifying by a gesture the use of a simple merino shawl, with silk fringes, kept for over ninety years in one of the oldest families shows us that this shawl takes on different ways of wrapping the body, depending on the occasion and the mood. A subtle symbolic language, probably an element of the *varino* identity (to be confirmed in compared studies),

acknowledged among the community's women, passed from generation to generation, in an almost mute seeing/doing which becomes engrained. A singular memory, set in the gestures: - "the shawl for everyday life", laid on the body without artifice; "the shawl for festivity", cheerful, falling from the shoulders; "the shawl for mass" and "the shawl for feeling" which out of respect or mourning, covers the head and comforts the pain.

The objects in this exhibition were presented as fragments of a family "reliquary", a pretext to spin tales, sketches of a "varino feeling" which is being transformed.

Another attempt, another case we submit here as example of a project in this area is that of exhibition "13", which was the public presentation and discussion of goals and methodologies of the Centre of Memories, in this case based on the photographs of the Américo Ribeiro Municipal Archive which, just like the Michel Giacometti Labour Museum, integrates the Museum Division of the Setubal Municipality.



13 Photographs, 13 Stories, 13 Films

"No one is equal to no one. Every human being is a strange singularity."

Carlos Drummond de Andrade

The photographs were the wick that set memory on fire. It could have been a hundred or half a dozen, but since everything has a beginning, we decided to go with 13, ward off the belief in misfortune, cause a shudder, register the coming together of the moment captured in the image and the unstable, conflicting images that memory keeps building and re-building within a certain time, referred to a certain space; to hear of mismatches (black spots in History), unveil suffering, create complicities, acknowledge the work and the struggles that set the difference, smile at the hesitations, the mishaps and the "things forgotten" which memory weaves; play on the metaphor of the number the ambiguity of the senses that cross the image (also the joys and their celebrations), capture in the uniqueness of each point of view the strange singularity which every human being is. This project catalyses the surprise, individual or collective, that lies on the discovery of a city never seen before from certain points of view. This is all about creating a new and sophisticated cartography of heritage with partners and volunteers, a cartography that is subjective, plural and diversified, reconstructed from the people and their worlds. What is presented here is an infinitesimal part of what we have collected, but the example remains, the synthesis, the pretext for the creation of a centre of memories that will methodically record what lies beyond the obvious. What makes us singular, strangely different, among equals.

This project is in progress. The exhibition has become a travelling exhibition, moving to formal and informal exhibition venues, such as bars, schools, municipal spaces, associations, among others.

The materials that resulted from the ongoing collection have been increasing the database on immaterial heritage and

Social Memory, and constitute a strong incentive to studies in this area. The partnerships and protocols we have signed with state and private universities, such as Lisbon's Faculty of Fine Arts and IADE – Institute of Visual Arts, Design and Marketing, have allowed us to combine theory and practice, creating very active inter-generational networks for heritage prospection and inventory. At the same time, we gather people with different skills, different life experiences, different perspectives on the social "uses" of this community property.

Accessible document collection

The starting point for this project involving the collection and register of oral memories was the Américo Ribeiro's photographs, a municipal archive which is part of Setúbal's cultural and artistic heritage.

So that we could achieve this synthesis, presented as an exhibition and a film, long and intense background work was necessary, starting in October 2007 and still in progress. So far 398 images have been processed, of which 94 regard Vitória Futebol Clube; 196, the city and its people; 27, the fish preserve factories and 81, the Flower Battle, among other festivals and rituals. In this path, life stories and memories have been collected, affections have been created and knowledge has been generated. Interpersonal networks were established involving the museums and the different groups in the community, contributing to lessening social and intellectual barriers which still today prevent some people from entering museums and having access to cultural and heritage goods which belong to all of us. With this project we aimed at bringing closer the community, the museums, the elements of heritage, and we took advantage of the unrepeatable opportunity to resort to informants who experienced certain events photographed by Américo Ribeiro, turning them into narrators of their own history.

Promoting the knowledge and life experiences of the community members, organized as documents accessible to the publics and the researchers, has allowed us to add to the museological spaces another research dimension, based on listening and on the commitment with the citizens, humanizing the range of services offered by museums as well as the contents of the immaterial heritage.

This kind of work enhances (brings to the fore) the elderly, a fact which adds immense value to the whole community and to themselves. These people, most of whom pensioners, may give precious time to research. The question lies in identifying interests and needs, discussing objectives and their respective work methodologies. It is a labour that entails a routine, in this specific case, weekly sessions, on Tuesday morning. The volunteers, with staff of the Américo Ribeiro photographic archive and of the museum, view and comment previously selected old photos related to the city, the changes in the urban landscape, the crafts, the festivities, the houses, the streets, among other elements. These allow us to reconstruct ways of life, value systems and representations which configure episodes or events that marked the lives of the people and the city. This precious (meticulous) work has allowed us to create an extensive database, featuring hundreds of entries, extended captions of the photos which are also a gallery of localized visual narratives. Mental places that remain registered (on file) in writing and image, for future memory, to the happiness of their co-authors. The wish to be accurate and the joy in corresponding is such that these community researchers organize themselves into small cafe meeting groups, or in associations to clarify doubts and review the subjects, even if that entails spending hours on end at the Municipal Library and/or in the Archives, confirming dates and confronting conclusions – this is also therapeutic work, it is like going back to school, it is being alive.



Photo processing carried out by Bruno Ferro, photography technician, and Maria José Madureira, volunteer at the **Américo Ribeiro Archive**.

Another area which we consider to be of crucial importance is related to the **memories of resistance**, paths and byways that many local families were forced to take to face the dictatorship regime. This is sensitive work, of an intense political nature, which requires thorough research and respectful listening. Part of these memories, already addressed in the “13” exhibition mentioned above, are being collected and organized for future memory. They are somehow an exorcism of one part of our History which insists on remaining enclosed in illusory pacification. These are hard memories, but also heroic memories, which deserve telling and re-telling, from various points of view. The reports collected are individualized syntheses of this country’s history, bitterly lived by families in this community, which flow into the immense sea of peoples’ fight for freedom and human rights, which cannot, must not, be suspended in a sort of silent limbo, captive of fear.

Cartografias da Memória [Cartographies of Memory] gave its name to an Intercultural Afternoon held in November 2009, at the Labour Museum in Setubal, with a view to discussing some anchor projects in Portugal, Spain and Brazil, which take Immaterial Heritage and Social Memory as the structuring axis of museological activity. This name refers to the imperative need to map the places, the institutions and the images that anchor the memories and give them ballast. This also served

to discuss methodologies used to collect, organize and disseminate life stories which are living examples of resistance. This event, which had the participation of museologists and heritage technical experts from Portugal and abroad was a joint initiative of the Museum and Associação Abril, and included the presence of “**Memória Media**” [Media Memory], an exemplary virtual platform of projects and studies on orality, culture, memory and identities, available at <http://www.memoriamedia.net/>

This project was supported by IELT, **Instituto de Línguas e Literaturas Tradicionais** [Institute of Traditional Languages and Literatures], of the New University of Lisbon.

Our Lady of the Rosary of Tróia **A devotional Festivity**

Another project we have been developing for about six years is the study of the Festivity of Our Lady of the Rosary of Tróia [Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Tróia], one of the few sea processions in Portugal. This summer festivity, which takes place in August, marks the annual cycle of fishing. The Tróia Festivity is the reference celebration for the Setúbal *varino* community, very closely bond to the Museum and the neighbourhood around it. The building where the Museum is located is itself an old fish preserve factory and symbolizes what physically remains of this industry. The memories and witness accounts collected throughout these years refer back to the system of representations, rites and beliefs which form the identity matrix of the community and the basis for the museological work, its “**Caderno de campo virtual**” [Virtual Field-Log].



For future memory. Festivity of Our Lady of the Rosary of Tróia, sea procession, August 2007



The image of **Our Lady of the Rosary of Tróia** being placed on the boat which will carry it to the other bank, August 2007, the year the Museum received its audiovisual recording equipment

Throughout these years of fieldwork, we have progressed in the means of recording and in the scope of the research itself. In the first year, we left for the terrain as observers, free from any type of record-keeping; the goal was merely to be with the people, to participate in the most elementary tasks of the festivity, following the organizing committee and keeping up with their pace. It was a year of bonding and silent (ceremonious) listening. In the subsequent years, from 2006 to 2009, after various work sessions and meetings held at the museum with sea-related families from Setúbal and Murtosa, we started collecting life stories and we filmed, at different stages, about 17 hours of sequences and episodes regarding the processes of establishing the festivity, its successive adaptations, the reactions and negotiations with the promoters of the tourist complex Troia Resort. Besides corresponding to the imperative need to document and discuss these processes, we sought to include the players in the action, implicating the whole community in the organization of exhibitions, in information gathering and in the cooperation projects between families which had been estranged, in some cases for almost a century. There are many uncles, cousins, brothers-in-law, among others, who had lost track of one

another. This path towards reconnecting is very strong. The festivity has been rejuvenated. In summer, in August, it is in the festivity that many of the families that have relatives in the United States, namely in New Bedford, meet. The space time relation, the social usages of this celebration, its continuity and/or adaptation to new models, this is one of the challenges of this study. With the video material recorded, two films were made (two visual documents) which are references for this work, and they are viewed at the museum at different times, in pre-defined contexts and also in family reunions since the festivity committee has copies which it uses in these circumstances.

This work, which is under way at present, is far from being finished although throughout the years it has been marked by various moments of exhibition and reflection, always with the participation of members of the community, students, photographers (namely Sérgio Jacques), journalists, researchers on the theme of sea-related festivities along the Portuguese coast and sea processions.

The festivity of Our Lady of the Rosary of Tróia is one of the anchor projects of the Centre of Memories and an extraordinary study reservoir.

Vitória Futebol Clube 100 years _ the first of the Republic

At present the Centre of Memories is working on a research project on Vitória Futebol Clube, iconic institution in the city, which celebrates this year its hundredth anniversary. This is a club which started in 1910, on 20 November, in the wake of the republican movement. In this specific case, we again worked on the very rich collection of photographs of the Américo Ribeiro Municipal Archive, in cooperation with a group of volunteers, themselves former leaders of the VFC.



Maria Miguel Cardoso, anthropologist of the Michel Giacometti Labour Museum team, key element in this project of the Centre of Memories, at the head-office of **Vitória Futebol Clube**, comparing *in loco* elements observed with the witness accounts of the volunteers **Rogério Carvalho** (right) and **Raúl Gamito**, former leaders of this hundred-year-old Club.

“100 years, 100 photos” was the motto for this work which started about a year and a half ago, a continuous and persistent challenge of looking at the various angles of the images and the episodes the memory has recorded far beyond the photographic time and the apparent four-lined visual limit of the photograph itself. The repertoire of meticulously recorded stories, under the supervision of anthropologist Maria Miguel Cardoso, became the raw material for the exhibition intitled “**Vitória de Setúbal 100 - O Primeiro da República**” [Vitória de Setúbal 100 – The First of the Republic], which could be visited at the Santiago fair in Setúbal in the summer.

The team: networks, complicities and combinations

The team of the Centre of Memories of the Michel Giacometti Labour Museum joins forces with other areas of the museum, namely with the Documentation Centre, which handles and provides the visual documents; the exhibitions and publications area and the educational service.

From this fieldwork, informal partnerships have been formed with local associations, the social centre, the parish, and protocols have been signed with universities, institutes and other museums, in Portugal and abroad. Example of this is the protocol we have just signed with the Sibiu Museum in Romania, equally interested in the study of memories and identities, with well-known work of an anthropological nature, which in some aspects is convergent with the work carried out by the Michel Giacometti Labour Museum.

The social and political dimension of Memory and Heritage

The change in paradigm regarding the notion of memory and the social uses of heritage happens not so much due to the distinction, which in our opinion is merely operational, between material and immaterial heritage, but especially through the growing awareness that it is society's duty to take as heritage referential the people and their bonds to memory and to identity.

Ulpiano Toledo Bezerra de Meneses, one of the most respected voices in the field of social history and cultural heritage, guest speaker at the opening conference of the 6th National Seminar of the Centre of Memory of Unicamp, Campinas (State University), in 2009, stated that the field of cultural values cannot be considered a map with clear borders, secure paths and precise destination points. As he recalled "We find ourselves before an arena of confrontation, an eminently political field, in the sense of shared management, where there is debate, consensus, dissent and conflict."

Cited at

<http://www.unicamp.br/unicamp/divulgacao/2009/10/15/ulpiano-meneses-atenta-para-mudanca-do-papel-do-estado-na-preservacao-do-patri>

In truth, there are no innocuous heritage nor unidirectional “stories”; this whole field of social memory and immaterial heritage is fluid and decidedly polysemic, for the most part conflicting. For this reason it makes sense to work the notion of heritage in networks and using several voices, in a logic of permanent construction, where antitheses spring out, for it is there that the vitality of the system lies, as well as its creative core.

How many “cities” are there in the city?

Bibliography, reference papers and *online* platforms

Memória e cultura material: documentos pessoais no espaço público, Ulpiano Toledo Bezerra de Menezes, Revista Estudos Históricos, Vol. 11, No 21 (1998), (p. 89-103), available online at:

<http://virtualbib.fgv.br/ojs/index.php/reh/article/view/2067/1206>
CONNERTON,

CONNERTON, Paul. Como as sociedades recordam. Oeiras, Celta Editora, 1993.

LE GOFF, Jacques. História e Memória. Campinas, Editora Unicamp, 2006.

MENESES, Ulpiano T. Bezerra de. Do teatro da memória ao laboratório da História: a exposição museológica e o conhecimento histórico. Anais do Museu Paulista. Nova Série, São Paulo, v. 2, jan./dez. 1994.

MAYRAND, Pierre, Parole de Jonas: essais de terminologie de la Muséologie Sociale. Cadernos de Sociomuseologia, ULHT- Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, nº31. Lisboa, 2009

NORA, Pierre. Entre memória e história. A problemática dos lugares. Projeto História, São Paulo, n. 10, dez. 1993.

PAIS, José Machado, Sociologia da vida Quotidiana. Teorias, Métodos e Estudos de Caso. Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, 2002

<http://www.memoriamedia.net/>

Cadernos de Sociomuseologia

Titles published by the Centro de Estudos de Sociomuseologia of ULHT

Nº1 Sobre o conceito de museologia social.

Various authors. Org. Mário Canova Moutinho. 1993. ULHT

Nº2 Novos rumos da museologia.

Mário de Souza Chagas. 1994. ULHT

Nº4 A construção do objecto museológico. The construction of the museological object. Mário Canova Moutinho. 1994. ULHT

Nº5 Museus e acção social. Various authors. 1996. ULHT

Nº9 Museologia e comunicação. Cristina Bruno. 1996. ULHT

Nº10- Museologia e museus: princípios, problemas e métodos.

Cristina Bruno. 1997. ULHT

Nº12 Imagem de vida, trabalho e arte. Manuelina Maria Duarte Cândido. 1998. ULHT

Nº13 Há uma gota de sangue em cada museu: a ótica museológica de Mário de Andrade. Mário Chagas. 1999. ULHT

Nº18 Reflexões museológicas: caminhos de vida, Maria Célia T. Moura santos, 2002, ULHT

Nº19 Museu e políticas de Memória, Mário de Souza Chagas and Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos, 2002 - ULHT

Equipments used to capture and process the images:

1 Sony DCR-VX 2100 Semi-professional video camera

1 Pentax K10D camera 2 IMAC 1TB / MacOSX 10.5.8.

This project, sponsored by the Setubal Municipality, was supported by Rede Portuguesa de Museus [Portuguese Museum Network] in the purchase of film and photography equipment, and by the company "Engel & Völkers ", which provided the required computer and software (*final cut*)

About the author

Isabel Victor is Director of the Museum Department of the Institute of Museums and Conservation (ICM), Portugal. She is former Head of the Museum Division of the municipality of Setubal, Portugal. PhD candidate in Sociomuseology at the Lusófona University in Lisbon.